

## Preparing Young Children for Disasters

Caring for children when they are not with their parents is a huge responsibility. This is especially true in the event of a disaster. Consider the types of disasters your community might face. In California nearly every kind of disaster can occur. Depending upon where you live, you will need to prepare for those possibilities.

Young children may not understand the seriousness of a disaster, but talking to them about disasters in terms they can understand will help keep them safe. Imagine how a young child might react during a disaster. He or she may whimper, cry, scream, run away, want to be held, regress, refuse to cooperate, be immobile with fear or withdraw. Now imagine how that child might react if they have practiced how to respond. Teaching young children what to do in a disaster will help protect them from harm. Here are some things that can be taught:

***Evacuation*** - Use a special “emergency” rhyme or song, play a “line-up” game or have a special whistle or bell to gather children together for evacuation. Use simple, matter-of-fact words and a calm but serious tone when practicing with children.

***Duck, Cover and Hold*** - Talk about what happens in an earthquake. Demonstrate how to duck under a sturdy object such as a table, cover your head and neck with your arms and hold there until the shaking stops. Show children the safest places to be in each room in case of an earthquake. Use images or characters to help children understand, for example, give the command: “lizards crawl under your rocks” or “turtles go into your homes.”

***Move away from windows*** - Teach children to keep away from windows since they could get hurt from shattering glass.

***Crawl along the floor*** - Children can learn to crawl along the floor to avoid smoke inhalation in case of fire.

***Stop, Drop and Roll*** - Teach children this response to burning clothing.

## Resources and References:

Head Start Disaster Preparedness Workbook, <http://www.cphd.ucla.edu/headstart.aspx>

American Academy of Pediatrics, Children and Disasters, <http://www.aap.org/disasters/index.cfm>

NACRRA, Children and Disasters, [http://www.naccrra.org/docs/pubs/Disasters\\_10131.pdf](http://www.naccrra.org/docs/pubs/Disasters_10131.pdf)

CA Child Care Health, [http://www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/healthandsafety/EmergencyEN061406\\_adr.pdf](http://www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/healthandsafety/EmergencyEN061406_adr.pdf)

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